Islam: Basic Principles and Characteristics

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Islam is the religion of truth. It is the embodiment of the code of life which God, the Creator and Lord of the universe, has revealed for the guidance of mankind.

For the proper development of human life, man needs two elements: (a) the resources to maintain life and to fulfill the material needs of the individual and society, and (b) knowledge of the principles of individual and social behavior to enable man to fulfill himself and to maintain justice and tranquillity in human life. The Lord of the universe has provided for both of these in full measure. To cater to the material needs of man, He has put all of nature's resources at his disposal. To provide for his spiritual, social, and cultural needs, He has raised His prophets from among men and has revealed to them the code of life that can guide man's steps to the right path. This code of life is known as Islam, the religion preached by all of the prophets of God.[1]

God said:

Say, "[0 Muhammad] we believe in God and in the Revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac Jacob and the Tribes. We believe in the Revelation that was sent to Moses, Jesus and all other Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between them, and to Him we surrender." (3:83; 2:136)

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[1] The Qur'an says:

"He has instituted the (same) religion for you (Muslims) as He recommended for Noah, and which We have revealed to you and recommended for Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Keep up religion and do not create any divisions in it." (42:13)

He has revealed to you (O Muhammad) the scripture with truth, confirming that which was revealed before it even as He revealed the Torah and the Gospel before as a guide to mankind and has revealed the Criterion (for judging between right and wrong). (3:3-4)

All of them called humanity to the way of the Lord, the way of submission to God. All of them gave the same message, and all of them stood for the same cause: Islam.

The Meaning of Islam

Islam is an Arabic word that denotes submission, surrender, and obedience. As a religion, Islam stands for complete submission and obedience to Allah—that is why it is called Islam. The other literal meaning of the word "Islam" is "peace." This signifies that one can achieve real peace of body and of mind only through submission and obedience to Allah.[2] Such a life of obedience brings peace of the heart and establishes real peace in society at large.

Those who believe and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of God-indeed it is in the remembrance of God alone that the heart of man finds rest-those who believe and act righteously, joy is for them, and a blissful home to return to. (13: 28-29)

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[2] The word "Islam" is from the root SLM (pronounced silm), which means "to surrender, to submit, to yield, to give one's self up. Thus aslama amrahu ila Allah means "he committed his cause to God" or "he resigned himself to the will of God." Aslama alone would mean "he committed himself to the will of God" or "he became a Muslim." The othr major shade of meaning in the root is "to become reconciled with one another" or "to make peace." Salm means "peace." So does silm, which also means "the religion of Islam." See Hans Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1971), pp. 424-25. Imam Raghib says in alMuiradat fi Gharib al Qur'an: "Islam, in law, is of two kinds: one is a simple confession with the tongue ... the other (is) that along with confession, there is belief in the heart and a fulfillment in practice, and resignation to God in whatever He brings to pass or decrees." Raghib further says: "Islam means entering into salary, and salary and silm both signify peace."

This message was preached by all the Prophets of God, who guided man to the right path. But man not only veered away from the right path again and again, but also lost or distorted the code of guidance that the prophets had bequeathed. That was why other prophets were sent to restate the original message and guide man back to the right path. The last of these prophets was Muhammad, who Presented God's guidance in its final form and arranged to preserve it for all time. It is this guidance that is now known as Islam and is enshrined in the Qur'an and the life-example (Sunnah) of the Prophet.

The basic Islamic concept is that the whole universe was created by God, whom Islam calls Allah, and who is the Lord and the Sovereign of the universe, which He Alone sustains. He created man and appointed for each human being a fixed period of life that he is to spend upon the earth. Allah has prescribed a certain code of life as the correct one for mankind, but has, at the same time, conferred upon man the freedom of choice as to whether or not he adopts this code as the actual basis of his life. One who chooses to follow the code revealed by God becomes a Muslim (believer) and one who refuses to follow it becomes a kafir (disbeliever).

A man joins the fold of Islam by honestly believing in and professing faith in the oneness of God and the prophet hood of Muhammad. Both of these beliefs are epitomized in the kalimah (the article of faith):

> *La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad Rasul Allah.*
> (There is no god except Allah; Muhammad is His Prophet.)

The first part of the kalimah presents the concept of tawhid (the oneness of God) and its second part affirms the prophet hood of Muhammad.

Tawhid: The Bedrock of Islam

Tawhid is a revolutionary concept and constitutes the essence of the teachings of Islam. It means that there is only one supreme Lord of the universe. He is omnipotent, omnipresent and the sustainer of the world and of mankind.

Now can one observe the inexhaustible creativity of nature, its purposefulness, its preservation of that which is morally useful and destruction of that which is socially injurious, and yet fail to draw the conclusion that behind nature there is an all-pervading mind of whose

incessant creative activity the processes of nature are but outward manifestations? The stars scattered through infinite space, the vast panorama of nature with its charm and beauty, the regular waxing and waning of the moon, the astonishing harmony of the seasons—all of these point towards one fact: there is a God. We witness a superbly flawless plan in the universe—can it be without a planner? We see great enchanting beauty and harmony in its working—can they be without a creator? We observe wonderful design in nature—can ~t be without a designer? We feel a lofty purpose in physical and human existence—can it be without a will working behind it? We find that the universe is like a superbly written, fascinating book—can it be without an author? Truly, God said:

O, Mankind: worship your Lord, Who created you and those before you, so that you may ward off evil; Who has made the earth a resting place for you, the sky a canopy and Who causes water to pour down from the heavens, thereby producing fruits as food for you. So do not set up rivals to God, when you know better. (Qur'an 2:21-22)

This is the basic tenet to which Muhammad asked humanity to adhere. It is an important metaphysical concept and answers the riddles of the universe. It points to the supremacy of law in the cosmos and the all-pervading unity behind the manifest diversity. It presents a unified view of the world and offers the vision of an integrated universe. It is a mighty contrast to the piecemeal views of the scientists and the philosophers and unveils the truth before the human eye. After centuries of groping in the dark, man is now coming to realize the truth of this concept, and modern scientific thought is moving in this direction.[3]

But it is not merely a metaphysical concept: it is a dynamic belief and a revolutionary doctrine. It means that all men are the creatures of one God and that they are therefore all equal. Any discrimination based on color, class, race, or territory is unfounded and illusory. It is a remnant of the days of ignorance that chained men down to servitude. Humanity is one single family under God, and there can be no sanction for those barriers. Men are one—and not bourgeois or proletarian, white or black, Aryan or non-Aryan, westerner or easterner. Islam gives us a revolutionary concept of the unity of mankind. The Prophet came to unite humanity on the word of God, which says:

Cling firmly together by means of God's rope, and do not be divided. Remember God's favor towards you when you were enemies; He united

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[3] See Francis Mason (ed.), The Creat Design, Duckworth.

your hearts so that you became brothers because of His favor. (Qur'an 3:103)

This concept also defines the true position of man in the universe. It says that God is the Creator and the Sovereign, while man is His vicegerent on the earth.[4] This exalts man to the noble and dignified position of being God's deputy on earth and endows his life with a lofty purpose: to fulfill the will of God on earth. This will solve all the perplexing problems of human society and establish a new order wherein equity and justice, as well as peace and prosperity, will reign supreme.

The starting point of Islam is the belief in the oneness of God (tawhid).

Prophet hood and Life after Death

The second part of the kalimah, on the other hand, signifies that God has not left man without any guidance for the conduct of his life. He has revealed His guidance through His prophets, and Muhammad was the last prophet. To believe in a prophet means to believe in the revelation that he has received, to accept the law that was transmitted to him by God, and to follow the code of conduct that he was instructed to pass on to humanity. Thus the second basic postulate of Islam is to believe in the prophet hood of Muhammad, to accept the religion that he presented, and to follow his commands and his example.

Every prophet of God, according to the Qur'an, strove to build man's relationship with God on the principle of His sovereignty and the individual's acknowledgment of the authority of the Prophet as a source of divine guidance. Every one of them said: "I am to you God's apostle, worthy of all trust. So be committed to God, heed Him, and obey me."[5]

The guidance is revealed through the prophets. It is a part of their mission to translate it into practice in their own lives and in the society they try to reform. All of the prophets are representatives of God, but they are human beings and their lives are models for mankind. Muhammad, since he was the last prophet, is the final model for mankind. To believe in him as a prophet of God means to accept his authority as representative of the

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[4] Qur'an 2:30-39.

[5] Qur'an 26:107-8, 110, 125-26, 131, 143-44, 150, 162-63, 178-79.

Supreme Ruler and to follow his example in thought and behavior. The code of behavior, the standard that determines rightness or otherwise (halal or haram) of any particular thing, was revealed to the Prophet and is known as the Shari'ah (the path). Belief in the Prophet involves acceptance of the Shari'ah and the attempt to implement it in all matters of daily life. This is how the will of God is fulfilled on earth.[6] The Qur'an says:

We have not sent any Messenger but that he was to be obeyed with God's permission. (4:64)

And about the Prophet, it is explicitly stated that:

Yet by your Lord, they will never believe until they make you a judge concerning what they are disputing among themselves; then they will find no inconvenience for themselves concerning whatever you have decided and submit completely. (4:65)

The test of one's acceptance of God and His Prophet lies in conducting all human affairs in accordance with the Law revealed to them:

And those who do not judge by what God has sent down are disbelievers. (5:44)

Thus belief in God and His Prophet means commitment to obey them and to fashion individual and collective life in the light of the law and the guidance that God revealed to His Prophet.

This automatically raises the question: Are those who follow the law and those who refuse to accept or abide by it on the same level of existence? Are they going to be treated in the same way? What are the consequences of differing attitudes and behaviors? This brings us to the third basic postulate of Islam: belief in the Hereafter.

The world, according to Islam, is a place of trial, and man is being judged in it. One day, he will have to give an account of all that he did during his lifetime. After his death, he will be resurrected in a new world, and it is here that he will be rewarded or punished for his deeds and misdeeds. Those who live a life of obedience to the Lord in the present world will enjoy eternal bliss in the Hereafter, and those who disobey His commands

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[6] Jesus, like all other prophets, presented the same message. This is what he means when he says: `"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

will have to face the bitter fruits of their disobedience. According to the Quran:

And every man's deeds have We fastened around his neck, and on the day of resurrection will We bring forth a book which shall be proffered to him wide open: (It will be said to him) "Read your record: This day there need be none but yourself to make out an account against you." (17: 13-14)

Whoever comes with a good deed, for him there shall be the like of it tenfold, while whoever comes with an ill-deed, he shall be required with only one like it, and they shall not be treated unjustly. (6:160)

Thus the basic articles of Islamic faith are: (a) belief in the oneness of God, (b) belief in the prophets and in the guidance that they bequeathed, (c) belief in the angels, (d) belief in the books, (e) belief in the Day of Judgment, and (f) belief in fate. Whoever professes these beliefs is a Muslim. And all of these concepts are epitomized in the kalimah: There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is His Prophet.

Some Basic Characteristics of Islam

George Bernard Shaw is reported to have said:

"I have always held the religion of Muhammad in high estimation because of its wonderful vitality. It is the only religion which appears to me to possess that assimilating capacity to the changing phases of existence which can make itself appeal to every age. I have studied him—the wonderful man—and in my opinion far from being an Antichrist, he must be called the Savior of Humanity. I believe that if a man like him were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world, he would succeed in solving its problems in a way that would bring it much needed peace and happiness. I have prophesied about the faith of Muhammad that it would be acceptable to the Europe of tomorrow as it is beginning to be acceptable to the Europe of today."[7]

The question is, what are those characteristics of Islam which have won millions of followers to the Faith in the past and which make it so appealing to the modern age? Some of the major characteristics of Islam are given in the following pages.

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[7] G. B. Shaw, The Genuine Islam 1, no. 8 (Singapore: 1936).

Simplicity, Rationality and Practicality. Islam is a religion without any mythology. Its teachings are simple and intelligible. It is free from superstitions and irrational beliefs. The oneness of God, the prophet hood of Muhammad, and the concept of life after death are the basic articles of its faith. They are based on reason and sound logic. All of the teachings of Islam flow from those basic beliefs and are simple and straightforward. There is no hierarchy of priests, no farfetched abstractions, no complicated rites and rituals. Everybody may approach the Qur'an directly and translate its dictates into practice.

Islam awakens in man the faculty of reason and exhorts him to use his intellect. It enjoins him to see things in the light of reality. The Qur'an advises him to pray:
O, my Lord! Advance me in knowledge (20:1 14).

It asserts that those who have no knowledge are not equal to those who have (39:9),

that those who do not observe and understand are worse than cattle (7:179), that the meanings of revelation become manifest to those who have knowledge (6:97)

and who have understanding (6:98),

that whosoever has been given knowledge indeed has been given an abundant good (2:269),

that the basic qualifications for leadership are, among other things, knowledge and physical strength (2:247),

and that of all things it is by virtue of knowledge that man is superior to angels and has been made vicegerent of God on earth (2:30).

The Prophet of Islam said: "*He who leaves his home in search of knowledge walks in the path of God" (Tirmidhi and Darimi)*[8] *and "To seek*

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[8] According to Tirmidhi, this hadith is weak. See Da'eef Sunanal Tirmi~lhi, no. 494 in AlAlbani.

knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim" (Ibn Majah and Bayhaqi). [9] This is how Islam brings man out of the world of superstition and darkness and initiates him into the world of knowledge and light.

Again, Islam is a practical religion and does not allow indulgence in empty and futile theorizing. It says that faith is not a mere profession of beliefs, but rather that it is the very mainspring of life. Righteous conduct must follow belief in God. Religion is something to be practiced and not an object of mere lip-service. The Qur'an says:

Those who believe and act righteously, joy is for them, and a blissful home to return to. (13: 29)

And the Prophet Muhammad said:

"God does not accept belief if it is not expressed in deeds, and does not accept deeds if they do not conform to belief." (Tabarani)

Thus Islam is a simple, rational and practical religion.

Unity of Matter and Spirit. A unique feature of Islam is that it does not divide life into watertight compartments of matter and spirit. It stands not for denial of life but for the fulfillment of life. Islam does not believe in asceticism. It does not ask man to avoid material things. It holds that spiritual elevation is to be achieved by living piously in the rough and tumble of life, not by renouncing the world. The Qur'an advises us to pray as follows:

"Our Lord! Give us something fine in this world as well as something fine in the Hereafter." (2:201)

God strongly censures those who refuse to benefit from His blessings. The Qur'an says:

Say: *"Who has forbidden God's finery which He has produced for His servants and the wholesome things from (His) provision?" (7:32)*

Islam's injunction is:

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[9] This hadith is saheeh according to Al-Albani. See Saheeh.lami-ul-Sagheer, no. 3913. According to al-Nawawi and Yahya al-Qattan, it is weak. See Takhreej Aha~leeth Ihyaa Uloom u/Deen, no. 43.

Eat and drink, but do not be extravagant. (7:31)

The Prophet said:

"A Muslim who lives in the midst of society and bears with patience the afflictions that come to him is better than the one who shuns society and cannot bear any wrong done to him."[10]

And:

"Keep fast and break it (at the proper time) and stand in prayer and devotion (in the night) and have sleep—for your body has its rights over you, and your eyes rights over you, and your wife has a claim upon you, and the person who pays a visit to you has a claim upon you."[11]

On another occasion he said:

"These three things are also enjoined upon the faithful: (a) to help others, even when one is economically hard-pressed, (b) to pray ardently for the peace of all mankind, and (c) to administer justice to one's own self."

Thus Islam does not admit any separation between "material" and "moral," "mundane" and "spiritual" life, and enjoins man to devote all of his energies to the reconstruction of life on healthy moral foundations. It teaches him that moral and material powers must be welded together and that spiritual salvation can be achieved by using material resources for the good of man in the service of just ends and not by living a life of asceticism or by running away from the challenges of life.

The world has suffered at the hands of the one-sidedness of many other religions and ideologies. Some have laid emphasis on the spiritual side of life but have ignored its material and mundane aspects. They have looked upon the world as an illusion, a deception, and a trap. On the other hand, materialistic ideologies have totally ignored the spiritual and moral side of life and have dismissed it as fictitious and imaginary. Both of these attitudes have resulted in disaster, for they have robbed mankind of peace,

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[10] This is reported by Ibn Majah, Tirmidhi, and al-Bukhari in Adab al Muirad Saheeh. See Silsilat al-Ahadeeth al-Saheehah, Al-Albani no. 939.
[11] Reported by Bukhari and Muslim. See Riyod as-Saliheer', no. 150 (1:102).

contentment, and tranquillity. Even today, the imbalance is manifested in one or the other direction. The French scientist Dr. De Brogbi rightly says: "The danger inherent in too intense a material civilization is to that civilization itself; it is the disequilibrium which would result if a parallel development, of the spiritual life were to fail to provide the needed balance."

Christianity erred on one extreme, whereas modern western civilization, in both of its variants of secular capitalistic democracy and Marxist socialism, has erred on the other. According to Lord Snell:

"We have built a nobly-proportioned outer structure, but we have neglected the essential requirement of an inner order; we have carefully designed, decorated and made clean the outside of the cup; but the inside was full of extortion and excess; we used our increased knowledge and power to administer to the comforts of the body, but we left the spirit impoverished ."[12]

Islam seeks to establish an equilibrium between these two aspects of life—the material and the spiritual. It says that everything in the world is for man, but man was created to serve a higher purpose: the establishment of a moral and just order that will fulfill the will of God. Its teachings cater to the spiritual as well as the temporal needs of man. Islam enjoins man to purify his soul and to reform his daily life—both individual and collective—and to establish the supremacy of right over might and of virtue over vice. Thus Islam stands for the middle path and the goal of producing a moral man in the service of a just society.

A Complete Way of Life. Islam is not a religion in the common and distorted sense, for it does not confine its scope to one's private life. It is a complete way of life and is present in every field of human existence. Islam provides guidance for all aspects of life—individual and social, material and moral, economic and political, legal and cultural, and national and international. The Qur'an enjoins man to embrace Islam without any reservation and to follow God's guidance in all areas of life.[13] In fact, it was an unfortunate day when the scope of religion was confined to the private life of man and its social and cultural role was reduced to naught, as has happened in this century. No other factor, perhaps, has been more important in causing the decline of religion in the modern age than its

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[12] Lord Snell, The New Wor/d (London: Watts & Co., 1947), 11.
[13] Qurtan 2:208.

retreat into the realm of private life. In the words of a modern philosopher:

"Religion asks us to separate things of God from those of Caesar. Such a judicial separation between the two means the degrading of both the secular and the sacred ... That religion is worth little if the conscience of its followers is not disturbed when war clouds are hanging over us all and industrial conflicts are threatening social peace. Religion has weakened man's social conscience and moral sensitivity by separating the things of God from those of Caesar."

Islam totally denounces this concept of religion and clearly states that its objectives are the purification of the soul and the reform and reconstruction of society. As we read in the Qur'an:

We have sent our messengers with explanations, and sent the book and the balance down with them, so that mankind may conduct themselves with all fairness. We have sent down iron wherein is great violence as well as benefits for mankind, so that God may know who is supporting Him and His messenger even though (He is) unseen. (57:25)

Discretion belongs only to God. He has ordered you to serve Him alone; such is the right religion, even though most men do not realize it. (1 2: 40)

(Muslims are) those who, if We establish them in the land will keep up prayer (salah) and pay the welfare due (zakah); command what is proper and forbid what is improper. (22:40-41)

The Holy Prophet said:

"Each of you is a keeper or a shepherd and will be questioned about the well-being of his fold. The head of the state will be questioned about the well-being of the people of the state. Each man is a shepherd to his family and will be answerable about every member of it. Each woman is a shepherd to the family of her husband and will be accountable for every member of it. And each servant is a shepherd to his master and will be questioned about the property of his master." (Bukhari and Muslim)

Thus even a cursory study of the teachings of Islam shows that it is an all-embracing way of life and does not leave out any field of human existence to become a playground for the forces of evil.[14]
Balance between the Individual and Society. Another unique feature of Islam is that it establishes a balance between individualism and collectivism. It believes in the individual personality of man and holds everyone personally accountable to God. It guarantees the fundamental rights of the individual and does not permit anyone to tamper with them. It makes the proper development of the personality of man one of the prime objectives of its educational policy. It does not subscribe to the view that man must lose his individuality in society or in the state.

According to the Qur'an:

Man shall have nothing but what he strives for. (53:39)

And whatever suffering you suffer, it is what your hands have wrought. (42:30)

God does not change what any people have until they change what is in themselves. (13:11)

God only assigns to a soul what it can cope with: in its favor stands whatever it has earned, while it is held responsible for anything it has brought upon itself. (2:286)

For us are our deeds and for you are yours. (28:55)

On the other hand, it also awakens a sense of social responsibility in man, organizes human beings in a society and a state, and enjoins the individual to subscribe to the social good. Prayer, in Islam, is offered in

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[14] For a more thorough study of different aspects of the Islamic way of life, see Abul A'la Mawdudi, Islamic Law and Constitution (Lahore: Islamic Publications, Ltd, 1960) and his l.slamic Way of Life (Lahore: 1967); Khurshid Ahmad, (edited), Studies in the Family Law of Islam (Karachi: 196()) and his Family Life in Islam (Leicesater: Islamic Foundation, 1974), M. B. Siddiqui, Some A.spects of the Islamic Economy (Lahore: 197()); M. Umer Chapra, The Economic System of Islam (Karachi: University of Karachi, 1971); K. Ahmad (ed.), Islam: Its Meuning and Message, 2d ed. (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1976); M. M. Ahsan, Islam: Faith and Practice (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1977).

congregation, a situation that inculcates social discipline among Muslims. Everyone is enjoined to pay zakah, and it has been laid down in the Quran that:

The beggar and the destitute have due rights in their (i.e., the rich man's) wealth. (51:19)

Jihad has been made obligatory, which means that the individual should, when the occasion arises, offer his life for the defense and protection of Islam and the Islamic state. The Prophet said:

"All mankind is a fold, each member of which shall be a keeper or shepherd to every other, and be accountable for the entire fold."

"Live together; do not turn against each other; make things easy for others and do not put obstacles in each other's way."

"He is not a believer who takes his fill while his neighbor starves. " [15]

"The believer in God is he who is not a danger to the life and property of any other."[16]

In short, Islam neglects neither the individual nor society—it establishes a harmony and a balance between the two and assigns to each its proper due.[17]

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[15] *Al Targheeb wa al-Tarheeb, al Mundhiree, classed as saheeh by al-Albani in Silsilat al-Ahadeeth al Saheeha, no. 149.*

[16] ``A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hand the Muslims are safe." (Bukhari and Muslim). The version he quotes is close to the one reported by alHakim in al-Mustadrak.

[17] It might be worthwhile to recall here what the late Professor H. A. R. Gibb said some time ago:

"Within the Western world Islam still maintains the balance between exaggerated opposites. Opposed equally to the anarchy of European nationalism and the regimentation of Russian communism, it has not yet succumbed to that obsession with the economic side of life which is characteristic of present-day Europe and present-day Russia alike. Its social ethic has been admirably summed up by Professor Massignon: 'Islam has the merit of standing for a very egalitarian conception of the contribution of each citizen by the tithe to the resources of the community, it is hostile

Universality and Humanism. The message of Islam is for the whole of the human race. God, in Islam, is the God of all the world (Qur'an 1:1) and the Prophet is a Messenger for the whole of mankind. In the words of the Quran:

O People! I am but a Messenger from God to you all. (7:158)

We have sent you only as a mercy for everybody in the universe. (21:107)

In Islam, all men are equal, regardless of color, language, race, or nationality. It addresses itself to the conscience of humanity and banishes all false barriers of race, status, and wealth. There can be no denying the fact that such barriers have always existed and continue to exist today in the so-called enlightened age. Islam removes all of these impediments and proclaims the ideal of the whole of humanity being one family of God.[18]

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to unrestricted exchange, to banking capital, to state loans, to indirect taxes on objects of prime necessity, but it holds to the rights of the father and the husband, to private property, and to commercial capital. Here again it occupies an intermediate position between the doctrines of bourgeois capitalism and Bolshevist communism."

"But Islam has a still further service to render to the cause of humanity. It stands after all nearer to the real East than Europe does, and it possesses a magnificent tradition of inter-racial understanding and co-operation. No other society has such a record of success in uniting in an equality of status, of opportunity, and of endeavour so many and so various races of mankind ....Islam has still the power to reconcile apparently irreconcilable elements of race and tradition. If ever the oppisition of the great societies of East and West is to be replaced by co-operation, the mediation of Islam is an indispensable condition. In its hands lies very largely the solution of the problem with which Europe is faced in its relations with the East. If they unite, the hope of a peaceful issue is immeasurably enhced. But if Europe, by rejecting the co operation of Islam, throws it into the arms of its rivals, the issue can only be disastrous for both. " H. A. R. Gibb, Wither Islam (London: 1932), p. 379.

[18] The Prophet said: "All creatures of God form the family of God and he is the best loved of God who loves best His creatures."

"Lord! Lord of my life and of everything in the universe! I affirm that all human beings are brothers to one another."

Islam is international in its outlook and approach and does not admit barriers and distinctions based on color, clan, blood, or territory, as was the case before the advent of Muhammad. Unfortunately, these prejudices remain rampant in different forms even in this modern age. Islam wants to unite the entire human race under one banner. To a world torn by national rivalries and feuds, it presents a message of life and hope and of a glorious future.

The historian, A. J. Toynbee, has some interesting observations to make in this respect. In Civilization on Trial, he writes:

"Two conspicuous sources of danger—one psychological and the other material—in the present relations of this cosmopolitan proletariat, i.e., [westernised humanity] with the dominant element in our modern Western society are race consciousness and alcohol; and in the struggle with each of these evils the Islamic spirit has a service to render which might prove, if it were accepted, to be of high moral and social value.

"The extinction of race consciousness between Muslims is one of the outstanding moral achievements of Islam, and in the contemporary world there is, as it happens, a crying need for the propagation of this Islamic virtue ... It is conceivable that the spirit of Islam might be the timely reinforcement which would decide this issue in favor of tolerance and peace.

"As for the evil of alcohol, it is at its worst among primitive populations in tropical regions which have been 'opened up' by Western enterprise ... the fact remains that even the most statesmanlike preventive measures imposed by external authority are incapable of liberating a community from a social vice unless a desire for liberation and a will to carry this desire into voluntary action on its own part are awakened in the hearts of the people concerned. Now Western administrators, at any rate those of 'Anglo-Saxon' origin, are spiritually isolated from their 'native' wards by the physical 'color bar' which their race-consciousness sets up; the conversion of the natives' souls is a task to which their competence can hardly be expected to extend; and it is at this point that Islam may have a part to play.

"Respect God and be affectionate to the family of God."

"In these recently and rapidly 'opened up' tropical territories, the Western civilization has produced an economic and political plenum and, in the same breath, a social and spiritual void ...

"Here, then, in the foreground of the future, we can remark two valuable influences which Islam may exert upon the cosmopolitan proletariat of a Western society that has cast its net around the world and embraced the whole of mankind; while in the more distant future we may speculate on the possible contributions of Islam to some new manifestation of religion."[19]

Permanence and Change. The elements of permanence and change coexist in human society and culture and are bound to remain so. Different ideologies and cultural systems have erred in leaning heavily towards one or other of these ends of the equation. Too much emphasis on permanence makes the system rigid and robs it of flexibility and progress, while a lack of permanent values and unchanging elements generate moral relativism, shapelessness, and anarchy.

What is needed is a balance between the two-a system that could simultaneously cater for the demands of permanence and change. An American judge, Mr. Justice Cardozo, rightly says "that the greatest need of our time is a philosophy that will mediate between conflicting claims of stability and progress and supply a principle of growth."[20] Islam presents an ideology which satisfies the demands of stability as well as of change.

Deeper reflection reveals that life has within it elements of permanence and change—it is neither so rigid and inflexible that it cannot admit of any change even in matters of detail, nor it is so flexible and fluid that even its distinctive traits have no permanent character of their own. This becomes clear from observing the process of physiological change in the human body, for every tissue of the body changes a number of times in one's lifetime even though the person remains the same. A tree's leaves, flowers, and fruits change but its character remains unchanged. It is a law of life that elements of permanence and change must co-exist in a harmonious equation. Only such a system of life that can provide for both these elements can meet all of the cravings of human nature and all of the needs of human society. The basic problems of life remain the same in all ages

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[19] Arnold J. Tovnbee. Civilization on Trial (London: 19571 205-99 See also 87-88.

[20] Justice Cardozo, 37, H. L. R., p. 279.

and climes, but the ways and means to solve them as well as the techniques of handling the phenomenon undergo change with the passage of time. Islam brings to focus a new perspective on this problem and tries to solve it in a realistic way.

The Quran and the Sunnah[21] contain the eternal guidance given by the Lord of the universe. This guidance comes from God, Who is free from the limitations of space and time and, as such, the principles of individual and social behavior revealed by Him are based on reality and are eternal. But God has revealed only broad principles and has endowed man with the freedom to apply them in every age in the way suited to the spirit and conditions of that age. It is through ijtihad (intellectual effort to arrive at the truth) that people of every age try to implement and apply the divine guidance to the problems of their times. Thus the basic guidance is of a permanent nature, while the method of its application can change in accordance with the peculiar needs of every age. That is why Islam always remains as fresh and modern as tomorrow's morn.

Complete Record of Teachings Preserved. Last, but not least, is the fact that the teachings of Islam have been preserved in their original form. As a result, God's guidance is available without adulteration of any kind. The Qur'an is the revealed book and word of God, which has been in existence for the last fourteen hundred years. It is still available in its original form. Detailed accounts of the life of the Prophet and of his teachings are available in their pristine purity. There has not been even one change made in this unique historic record. The sayings and the entire record of the life of the Prophet have been handed down to us with unprecedented precision and authenticity in works of the hadith and the sirah.[22] Even a number of

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[21] The Sunnah is the lifestyle of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as recorded authentically in his sayings, actions, silent approvals, and his physical and moral attributes before and after the revelation of the Qurtan. The Sunnah has legislative authortiy for Muslims as do his sayings, actions, and silent approvala after he was commissioned by Allah with prophethood.

[22] The sirah is the biography of the Prophet (pbuh). The earliest extant work is that of Ibn Hisham, which was based largely on the work of Ibn Ishaq, a hadeeth scholar of the second generation after the generation of the Companions of the Prophet. The difference between hadeeth and sirah is that the sirah is arrayed chronologically and covers major events. The hadeeth are frequently organized according to subject matter and include statements devoid of context. Both are related with chains of narrators.

non-Muslim critics admit this eloquent fact. Professor Reynold A. Nicholson, in his A Literary History of the Arabs, says:

"*The Koran is an exceedingly human document, reflecting every phase of Muhammad's personality and standing in close relation to the outward events of his life; so that there we have materials of unique and incontestable authority for tracing the origin and early development of Islam, such materials as do not exist in the case of Buddhism or Christianity or any other ancient religion."*[23]

These are some of the unique features of Islam that establish its credentials as the religion of man—the religion of today and the religion of tomorrow. These aspects have appealed to millions of people in the past and the present and have made them affirm that Islam is the religion of truth and the right path for mankind. There is no doubt that these aspects will continue to appeal to even more people in the future. Men with pure hearts and sincere longing for truth will always continue to say:

"I affirm that there is none worthy of worship except God, that He is One, sharing His authority with no one, and I affirm that Muhammad is His Servant and His Prophet."

[23] Nicholson, R. A., A Litera~y History of the Arahs (Cambridge: 1969), 143.